Studying for Tests

Studying for tests is a common (and often dreaded) part of the college experience. Students sometimes procrastinate studying for their tests because of their anxiety about the test and its outcomes. Other students may even decide to “wing it” rather than face their anxiety. It’s important to remember, however, that professors use tests as a way to gauge student learning. You should think of these as opportunities to demonstrate your knowledge and learning to your professor and show off what you know.

Keys to Success

In order to help you study for tests, follow these keys to success:

Get comfortable! It’s hard to complete a task that you already don’t want to do if you’re uncomfortable. Instead, find a quiet place to study, use ambient music to help you relax, and find a place where you can relax. Stay away from studying in bed or you may be tempted to take a nap rather than start your studying.

Make it part of the routine. Make studying part of your routine throughout the term, so that you don’t have to try to refresh the information all at once. Review your notes before and after class to keep the material fresh. You can also write short reflections on the materials after reviewing them, making sure to note places ah-ha! moments (or where you understood the information) and muddiest moments (places where you need more clarification).

Plan ahead. If you wait to last minute to study, you’ll miss out on the resources available. Instead, when you know there is a test coming up, you should plan to use resources, such as a campus tutors, to help you prepare. You can also visit your professor’s office hours to ask questions about the exam or to clarify your notes, so you’re ready for your study session.

Look at previous work. Gather your previous work and exams (if available) to review a) places where you are confident about the material and b) places where you need to focus more attention. You can also see if the particular professor has any trends in the kind of work s/he assigns such as application questions rather than definitions or course themes that keep coming up.

Block your time. You shouldn’t make your study session more than thirty minutes. After that time, your concentration and focus decreases, and you won’t retain the information you’re reviewing. If you have to do longer blocks, make sure to work in a brief break of ten to fifteen minutes to help your brain (and body!) recharge.

Create a study group. Studying is always easier if you can do it with your peers. You can review and exchange notes, ask one another questions, and quiz one another on the material. Study groups work because you are more likely to retain the information that you read, discuss, and teach.